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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001370

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IRANIAN ELECTION PROTESTER'S TORTURE ALLEGATIONS

Classified By: Consul Karen Ogle for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. CONOFF spoke with Ebrahim Sharifi (please strictly protect) on Thursday September 17 concerning his involvement in Iran's recent election and post election activities as well as his detainment, torture, and sodomy by government authorities. Sharifi discussed his efforts to expose the government's abuse of prisoners in order to prevent future abuses from occurring. Sharifi further expressed grave concern over tomorrow's planned protest during Iran's Jerusalem Day events. END SUMMARY.

#### PRE-ELECTION ACTIVITIES

12. (C) Sharifi noted that he campaigned for Mehdi Karroubi prior to the election but supported any candidate other than Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He stated the goal of most of his colleagues was to oust Ahmadinejad from office. He further noted that prior to the election, government authorities did not interfere with the opposition campaigns. Government harassment and violence occurred when the government could not control the size of the post election protests. He personally saw a sniper shoot and kill a protester from a nearby rooftop. He added that government efforts focused on instilling terror in the people. He explained that his involvement was solely internet based. He simply would post the time and place for protesters to gather on his web site. He believes that one of the reasons authorities became interested in him was through monitoring of his web activity by the intelligence branch of the Islamic Republic Guard Corps (IRGC). He stated he had been threatened multiple times that if he was not careful he and his family would die in an "accident." After he went to the Italian Embassy in Tehran to request a student visa, he was arrested by IRGC intelligence officers.

#### ARREST, TORTURE AND RELEASE

13. (C) Sharifi said he was blindfolded and taken to an undisclosed location where he was tortured. As he was blindfolded the entire time he could only rely on the sounds around him. Based on the level of noise coming from the beatings, whippings, and screaming he believes that at least 30 or 40 people were in the facility. As he displayed a large and wide scar on his stomach, he noted that he was beaten so severely that his stomach had ripped open. When Sharifi questioned the authorities on why they would not just kill them all now, the chief guard ordered all prisoners in the room to be taken away and sodomized. Sharifi confirmed to CONOFF that he had been sodomized, and he was aware that others were sodomized as well. After seven days, authorities threw him out on the street. On the advice of his lawyer, he later made a formal complaint to the police. The police responded that his file was with the intelligence services and that he was not "supposed to be alive." This led Sharifi to believe that the only reason he was released was that they thought he would bleed to death from his beatings.

14. (C) For about the next six weeks Sharifi worked with Mehdi Karroubi in order to expose the atrocities he and others had experienced. He commented that he saw one female rape victim who had had her hands bound after being raped to prevent her from committing suicide. He made a video testimony for Karroubi to take to the Majlis in which he detailed his experience. He noted that Karroubi, Hashemi Rafsanjani and a few others have copies of the testimony to prevent government authorities from destroying the evidence. He genuinely believes the exposure of the atrocities may have saved existing and future detainees' lives. He believes if he did not speak out the government could swiftly and quietly eliminate all members of the opposition, even Karroubi. Sharifi maintains some contact with Karroubi but it appears now to be limited since he left for Turkey on August 23. He said that the only reason he left was to protect his family from government threats. Otherwise he wished to stay and continue to resist the government. His friends tell him that Iranian police monitor his family's home on a daily basis.

#### GOI EFFORTS TO CONCEAL ABUSES

15. (C) Sharifi also discussed the government's efforts to prevent his exposure of the torture as well as eliminate opposition members. He explained that the government tried to claim that while Sharifi was detained, a member of Karroubi's National Trust Party, Ali Bigdeli, passed money to him so that he would make up stories of abuse. Sharifi stated that he had no reason to lie as he is financially well off and had imminent plans to study in Italy. He noted that similarly, when the infamous protester Neda Soltani was killed, the government first claimed she was alive and that the BBC had made up the story. He added that when he was examined by the official doctors for signs of torture that they refused to release any report confirming that torture had occurred. Sharifi also noted that many of the protesters had been labeled as "kaffirs" which means those that exit the faith of Islam. He said that this was the justification used by authorities to allow for and even encourage the killing of protesters like himself.

#### JERUSALEM DAY FEARS

16. (C) Sharifi believes that change in Iran depends on how far the authorities are willing to go to suppress the opposition. He noted that efforts such as his help prevent the government from continuing its atrocities. Sharifi is fearful concerning the September 18 Jerusalem Day events in Iran. He believes that protesters will come out in force and the government will respond harshly. He noted that the last time Ali Khamanei spoke, authorities displayed rocket propelled grenade launchers on their shoulders. He further commented that Rafsanjani's being barred from speaking at the event at the last minute is a bad sign.

17. (C) During the interview Sharifi was highly nervous about his surroundings. He even sat physically close to CONOFF and at times whispered his responses. He said he was very concerned about his safety in Turkey and asked if anything could be done to speed up his process with the UNHCR. (Comment: He has registered with UNHCR in Turkey, and has been scheduled for an interview in January.) Finally, he inquired if it was possible to relocate to a third country with a higher level of security as he is afraid of becoming the victim of an "accident" here in Turkey.

#### JEFFREY

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